Engaging with the public:
A review of the practices and experience of SEI and its peers

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ABSTRACT

Public engagement with science is important for increasing scientific literacy of the public, helping increase support for government funding for science projects, and raising awareness of environmental issues and of how people can mitigate and adapt to changing environments. This document presents the results of research conducted under the project "Evaluation of SEI Engagement Methods", which examined how both SEI and its peers engage with the public. It includes two major components – an internal SEI review, and a desk study of other key organizations – as well as a summary of a day-long workshop held in January 2014 at SEI.

CONTENTS

FOREWORD

Public engagement with science is important for increasing scientific literacy of the public, helping increase support for government funding for science projects, and raising awareness of environmental issues and of how people can mitigate and adapt to changing environments. Engagement can be seen as a spectrum: from one-way communication (from researchers to "the public") at one end, to "co-created" research projects at the other, with members of the public directly participating in the design, research activities and analysis.

SEI engagement activities occur across this spectrum. This document presents the results of research conducted under the project "Evaluation of SEI Engagement Methods", which examined how both SEI and its peers engage the public with scientific research. The work included case studies, a survey of SEI staff, a desk study of other organizations' engagement activities, and a day-long workshop for SEI staff held in Stockholm in January 2014.

The goal of this project is to identify best practices, encourage wider adoption of effective engagement methods, and start building a community of practice at SEI to continue to share knowledge and learn together how best to engage the public in different project contexts. The materials presented here were developed primarily for internal use, but are shared here to contribute to broader discussions and invite feedback from both within and outside SEI. Part I focuses on our internal review; Part II presents insights from a review of our peers' activities.

LEARN MORE AND GET INVOLVED

We invite feedback and engagement from our SEI colleagues and partners. To share your comments about our work, learn more, and/or get involved with the Participatory Research Group, contact Sarah West at sarah.west@sei-international.org.

PART I: SEI's public engagement activities

1. A SURVEY OF SEI STAFF

A key part of this project involved surveying SEI staff to learn about their current practices of engaging with and communicating to the general public. The focus was on areas where members of the public have direct contact with SEI researchers on issues around climate change.

1.1 Methods

A SurveyMonkey[1] questionnaire was piloted with two members of staff, modified based on their feedback and distributed to all SEI staff by email (using the SEI-ALL email list) in November 2013. A link to the questionnaire was also placed on each of the Theme intranet sites. The questionnaire was closed in December 2013.

The questionnaire contained a mixture of closed and open questions, and was designed using question logic which allowed respondents to skip irrelevant questions based on their previous responses. Questions and response type are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Questions asked and type of response elicited

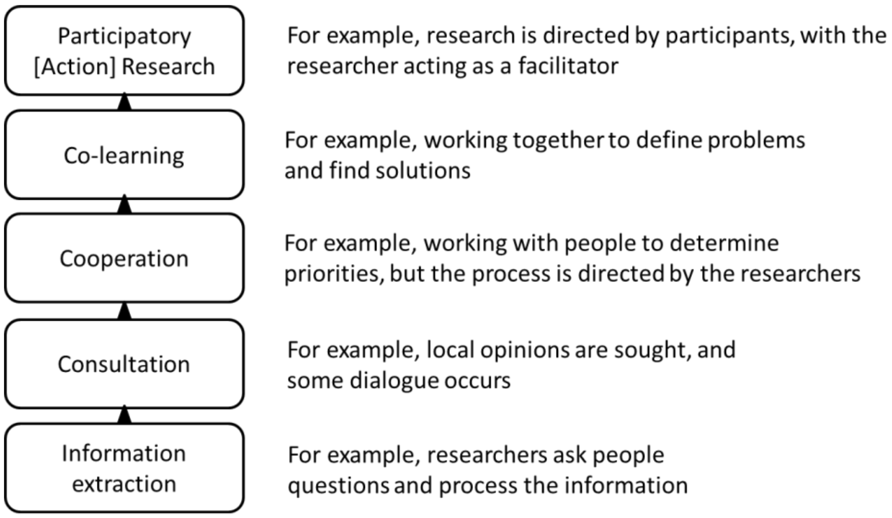
Number	Question	Response type
1	What is your name?	Open
2	Which SEI Centre are you employed by?	Multiple choice (Africa, Asia, Stockholm, Tallinn, US, York)
3	Do you engage with members of the public on any topics of climate change (even if it is not primarily framed as climate change)?	Multiple choice (Yes; No, I do not do any engagement around climate change; No, I do not do any engagement with the public in my work), with comment space
4-7	Please give the name of one project (active post 2009) in which you have engaged the public with climate change issues:	Open
8,12,16, 20	Thinking about your X project, [project name inserted], what type of engagement would you categorize this as?	Multiple choice (Information extraction, Consultation, Cooperation, Co-learning, Participatory (Action) Research), with comment space
9,13,17, 21	Thinking about your X project, [project name inserted], what types of groups/individuals are you working with? Please be as specific as possible e.g. what levels of government, size of business, geographic location, age range, etc.	Open
10,14,18 ,22	Please list the methods you use for engagement on this project	Open
11,15,19 ,23	How often do you do such engagement in your [project name inserted] project?	Multiple choice (Daily, Weekly, Monthly, Twice a year, Less frequently) with comment space
24	Why do you engage the public with issues around climate change?	Open
25	Do you conduct any monitoring or evaluation of your engagement activities? Please give details.	Open

[1] See: http://www.surveymonkey.com.

26	What do you consider effective engagement to be?	Open
27	How effective do you think this engagement is? If you do multiple forms of engagement, please distinguish between the different types	Open
28	What has been the most important lesson you've learned about engaging the public with research (i.e. something you will always, or never, do again based on past experience)?	Open

The questionnaire contained a diagram (Figure 1) which was designed to help categorize projects in terms of the level of their engagement with people, from information extraction which can use participatory methods, to Participatory Action Research where research is directed by participants.

Figure 1: Levels of participation



Note: This figure was included as part of questions 8, 12, 16 and 20. It is based on a diagram in: Forrester, J., Swartling, Å. G. and Lonsdale, K. (2008). Stakeholder Engagement and the Work of SEI: An Empirical Study. *SEI Working Paper. Stockholm Environment Institute. http://www.sei-international.org/publications?pid=838.*

Analysis

Quantitative data were explored using a mixture of Survey Monkey's own software and Microsoft Excel. Free text qualitative data were explored through coding using an inductive approach, where codes arise from the data rather than using pre-defined categories. The visualization software Wordle[2] was used to begin the process of coding.

1.2 Findings

Respondent profiles

There were 58 respondents in total, though 10 of these did not fully complete the questionnaire. Staff from each Centre responded; see Table 2. There are 180 SEI staff (research and support staff), so this represents a 32% response rate.

[2] See: http://www.wordle.net.

Table 2: Respondents by SEI Centre

Centre	
Stockholm	26
York	15
US	8
Oxford	3
Tallinn	3
Africa	2
Asia	1

Amount of engagement

Unsurprisingly, given the title of the questionnaire and accompanying email, the majority of respondents said they do engage with the public; only 15 of the 58 respondents said they do not. Two of the latter qualified their answer by saying that they engaged with “stakeholders” and “climate negotiators”, but not the public. This raises interesting questions about how different people may understand the terms “public” and “public engagement”. It may be that more SEI researchers are engaging with actors whom they do not consider to be “the public” than is reflected in the survey results. Another five respondents said they do engage with the public, but not on climate change issues. The rest of the analysis presented here, however, focuses only on the 38 staff who reported public engagement around climate change.

Staff engage with the public in their projects at a variety of frequencies; see Table 3. This indicates that some staff are spending considerable amounts of time engaging with the public, whilst others engage less regularly.

Table 3: Responses to ‘How often do you do such engagement on your project?’

Frequency	
Daily	3
Weekly	7
Monthly	17
Twice a year	6
Less frequently	11

There was variation in the number of projects incorporating engagement in which staff have been involved since 2009. Seven respondents listed four projects, the maximum permitted. In total, 59 different projects active since 2009 were listed.

Staff engage with a large range of different types of “public”, as can be seen in Table 4. Governments and specific government agencies were mentioned most frequently, but so were considerable numbers of community organizations. This highlights the breadth of SEI’s engagement activities.

Table 4: Coded responses to 'What types of groups/individuals are you working with?'

Organization type	Number of times mentioned
Government (city or national)	14
Government agencies (regional or national)	13
Companies	10
Local residents / Community	9
Community groups	7
Policy-makers	7
NGOs	7
Academics	6
Farmers	6
Practitioners	5
Landowners	5
Research organizations	4
Policy advisors	4
Industry associations	4
Local NGOs	2
City planners	2
Health care providers	2
Water authorities	2
Students / schools	2
Advocacy groups	1
Faith organizations	1

Types of engagement

Staff were asked what types of engagement they conduct, using the "ladder of engagement": from information extraction to participatory action research (see Figure 1). The majority of projects listed were deemed to entail information extraction, but there were also considerable numbers of projects at the more participatory end of the scale (see Table 5).

Table 5: Types of engagement[3]

Type	Number of projects listed
Participatory (Action) Research	8
Co-learning	20
Cooperation	11
Consultation	15
Information extraction	27

SEI staff reported using a very large range of different methods when engaging with the public, as shown in Table 6. The most frequently cited methods were workshops, interviews and meetings. Interestingly, face-to-face engagement was mentioned far more frequently than any of the more passive engagement tools, such as webcasts, websites, social media, press releases, policy briefs, etc. It may be that SEI staff do not see such methods as "public engagement".

[3] Note that this adds up to more than the number of projects, as some projects were felt to involve multiple types of engagement.

Table 6: Coded responses to 'Please list the methods you use for engagement'

Methods	Number of times mentioned
Workshop	9
Interview	8
Meeting	8
Focus group	7
PGIS	6
Presentation	6
Training day	4
Blog	3
Discussion	3
Q-Methodology	3
Social network analysis	3
Agent-based modelling	2
Community event	2
Discussion group	2
Joint research project	2
Lecture	2
Questionnaire	2
Seminar	2
Survey	2
Website	2
Action plan	1
Action research	1
Document analysis	1
E-newsletter	1
Guided site visit	1
On-street engagement	1
Participatory Bayesian modelling	1
Participatory observation	1
Policy brief	1
Press Release	1
Publication	1
Report	1
Shared learning dialogue	1
Social media	1
Symposium	1
Web forum	1
Webcast	1
Working group	1

Staff gave a large range of reasons why they engage the public (see Table 7). Obtaining information from people was mentioned most often, but themes about raising awareness, building capacity and sharing knowledge also emerged.

Table 7: Coded responses to 'Why do you engage the public with issues around climate change?'[4]

Reason given	Number of times mentioned
Obtain information	7
Raise awareness	3
This is where change will need to take place	3
Build capacity	2
Share knowledge	2
Support decision makers	2
To reach out beyond academia	2
Build resilience	1
Change attitudes	1
Enjoyable	1
Facilitate economic development	1
Gain feedback	1
Influence behaviour	1
It's expected	1
Make better science	1
Make research policy relevant	1
Set research agenda	1
Understand decision making processes	1

Evaluation of engagement

Staff were also asked to share the "most important lesson you've learnt about engaging the public with research". Twenty-two people responded to this question, and responses were mainly practical recommendations, but also included general principles such as "*Believe in the worth of my research, even when it may seem trivial compared to the immediate concerns of some of the members of the public engaged with (e.g. not have enough to eat every day)*." Another important general comment was relating to using appropriate methods: "*If we wish to contribute to change processes at the same time we better understand them, more direct engagement and co-learning processes are a better tool. I find both important and apart from the time intensive nature of the action-research end of the spectrum, find both quite enjoyable!"* The remainder of the other comments were relating to knowing the audience, being realistic about what can be achieved in the time available, the need to be a good facilitator, and how to recruit participants. These are summarized below:

1. Know your audience

- Closely identify needs;
- Know the audience;
- Translate content for audience (mentioned twice);

2. Be realistic about what you can achieve

- Don't make promises you can't deliver;
- Don't be too ambitious;
- Start simply;
- Share difficulties with group;
- Allocate sufficient time for engagement process;

[4] There were 28 respondents to this question.

- Don’t be in a rush;
- Provide ample brainstorming time;
- Be realistic about the time required from participants;
- Take time to listen;

3. Be a good facilitator

- Allow participants to have control and influence;
- Respect others’ opinions;
- Recognize that facilitation is a skill and requires training;
- Ensure everyone can contribute;
- Be flexible (mentioned three times);
- Be well prepared (mentioned twice);
- Provide participants with ideas;
- Don’t drown the public with details;
- Have a consent form;
- Let people leave whenever they want;
- Create a sense of group responsibility;

4. Recruit the right people

- Use community champions to talk to peers (mentioned twice);
- Simultaneously engage stakeholders at different levels;
- Don’t assume representatives of stakeholders want to be involved;
- Recognize that people are interested in issues that concern them.

Staff were also asked to explain what they considered effective engagement to be. There were 24 responses to this question, and they highlight the diversity of what effective engagement can be. Effective engagement was felt to be where:

- There is active participation and participants take ownership, agree on a problem and solutions; this is related to the engagement being relevant to the stakeholder;
- Capacity is built among the participants;
- Change can be observed in participants (over various time-scales, depending on the project);
- There is frequent dialogue between those involved in the research;
- Information from stakeholders is used to guide the research.

Twenty-six staff (of a possible 38) responded to the question about whether they evaluate their projects; 22 (58%) said they were evaluating their projects in some way, using a variety of methods, including interviews, focus groups, meetings and feedback forms. It should be noted that some respondents indicated that the evaluation conducted was rather informal – for example, *“Not in a scientific way, informally only”*; 8% said they were doing monitoring but not evaluating, and 35% said they were not doing any monitoring or evaluating. This is surprising, given that SEI has an in-house monitoring and evaluation tool, the Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Communication (PMEC) system.[5] This raises the question of how we can know whether or not our engagement is effective, if we’re not evaluating it.

[5] See De Bruin, A. (2013). *Measuring the Outcomes of SEI’s Work: The Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Communication (PMEC) System*. SEI Fact Sheet. Stockholm Environment Institute. http://www.sei-international.org/publications?pid=2347.

1.3 Concluding thoughts

SEI staff are engaging with a wide variety of "publics" around the issue of climate change. We use a huge diversity of methods, depending on the specific situation and audience. Engagement approaches include fairly one-way communication of information from us as researchers to our "public", through to participatory action research projects which aim for transformative change through participating in research.

Given the range of expertise around engagement held within SEI, we need to improve our communication with one another, so that we can share best (and worst) practice and lessons learned. We also need to emphasize our expertise in this area in our external-facing communications, such as the SEI website, social media, etc., drawing on examples of our peers' engagement collated by Anna Taylor (see Part II).

2. SEI'S PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT OVER TIME

SEI has a long tradition of public engagement, and a tradition of reflecting on that engagement. As part of the project, we wanted to see how SEI's engagement work has changed over time. In 2008, SEI researchers John Forrester, Åsa Gerger Swartling and Kate Lonsdale had conducted a review of stakeholder engagement within SEI.[6] Their aim was to communicate SEI's expertise in the area, draw that expertise together to learn as an organization, and contribute to the growing theoretical debate.

The 2008 report made recommendations to improve institutional learning on stakeholder engagement:

- SEI should adopt shared institute-wide principles for ways of working with stakeholders, and an agreement on a minimum set of values, objectives and/or behaviours.
- SEI should draw more systematically upon existing in-house expertise in participatory methods and processes; researchers should be able to call their colleagues to discuss and exchange ideas. When applicable, training and mentoring should be offered to SEI staff who request support.
- Researchers need support to reflect on what is emerging, what works well and what could be done differently. This could be achieved by promoting "learning sets" that could offer a forum for discussing past experience, challenging assumptions and developing practice in a safe and constructive environment.
- The institute should deepen SEI's interactions with external organizations, to contribute insights to research theory on the use of new participatory techniques, issues of spatial scale and level of governance, and ways to promote mutual learning.

In an interview for this project conducted by Alison Dyke in November 2013, Forrester and Swartling said they do not believe SEI researchers are yet realizing their potential as contributors to the theory of participatory research, and remain mostly only practitioners. However, they do see progress in terms of understanding the role of participatory research in projects that aim to change attitudes or behaviours. There is also a greater recognition by funders of the value of participatory and reflexive approaches; other disciplines are also embracing them, such as ecology.

[6] Forrester, J., Swartling, Å. G. and Lonsdale, K. (2008). *Stakeholder Engagement and the Work of SEI: An Empirical Study*. SEI Working Paper. Stockholm Environment Institute. http://www.sei-international.org/publications?pid=838.

Overall, Forrester and Swartling said, their 2008 review was successful in that enduring collaborations were built, both internally and externally. However, the mechanisms needed to promote institutional learning have yet to be put in place. The authors now see a role for synthesis publications and for creating new mechanisms for co-learning within SEI.

3. THE SEI PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT WORKSHOP

On 31 January 2014, while a large number of staff were at SEI headquarters in Stockholm, the project team ran a day-long engagement workshop. Nineteen staff members participated, representing all seven SEI centres, including the project team (Sarah West, Alison Dyke and Radek Rudnicki, from SEI York, and Anna Taylor, of SEI Oxford, via Skype); Stacey Noel and Jacqueline Senyagwa, of SEI Africa; Albert Salamanca, of SEI Asia; Nick Depsky, of SEI-US; Sukaina Bharwani and Michael Rastall, of SEI Oxford; Karin André, Katarina Axelsson, Toby Gardner, Ylva Rylander, Åsa Gerger Swartling and Gregor Vulturius of SEI Stockholm; Valdur Lahtvee, of SEI Tallinn; and Annemarieke de Bruin and Joanne Morris of SEI York. Most participated in the full day's sessions; Valdur Lahtvee, Joanne Morris, Stacey Noel, Albert Salamanca and Anna Taylor only attended for half the day.

Discussion was based around questions suggested by the participants and was captured on paper. Images of the discussion sheets are presented below, along with a summary of the main points. Identified actions arising from the discussions are shown in Table 1.

3.1 What is engagement?

The group discussed how we define engagement, and what the most effective methods of engagement are for different audiences. We also discussed what level of engagement is achievable and/or desirable within the context of what we do. Participants also talked about norms: Are there ideal standards that SEI should be working with? (see Section 3.10).

3.2 What forms of engagement are there?

One discussion focused on exploring the framework or typology within which we work. In the past, hierarchies or ladders of participation have been suggested, but we shied away from this, appreciating that different approaches are suited to different situations. We did, however, divide our work into three main types:

- **Participatory Action Research:** This is research which is in-depth, context specific and rich in detail. Objectives are created by participants, capacity is built through the process, and the project develops new knowledge and/or skill sets. Multiple, flexible methods are used.
- **Co-exploration and learning:** This is used by scientists to collect data and decide on content of projects. Working with decision-makers helps them to understand

uncertainty. The potential outcomes of these types of project are awareness-raising, reinforcement of ideas, attitudinal change and behavioural change.

- **Information extraction:** This is “standard” research, used to understand context, gain information from participants, etc. It could involve network mapping, stakeholder mapping, horizon scanning, etc. There may not be any immediate benefit to the participants, but it can be an essential part of the project.

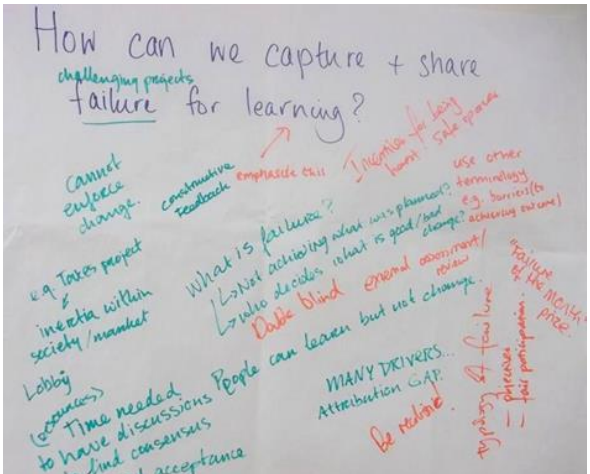
3.3 How do we define and measure outcomes from participatory research?

Outcomes that can be achieved through participatory research include changes in behaviour and attitude, capacity, connections between people etc. Participants noted that it might be useful to think of outcomes in terms of those you expect to achieve, those you would like to achieve, and those you would love to achieve. Change can be planned or unplanned, and negative as well as positive. Participants also stressed that in order to measure outcomes, knowing the baseline is critical. A well-defined theory of change is important as well. It was noted that the logic model (which lists inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes/impacts to demonstrate how a project is “supposed” to work) is not always appropriate; for example, attendance at a workshop does not necessarily lead to change. In some projects, the participatory process itself is as important as the outputs and outcomes.

Another discussion focused on monitoring the effectiveness of our engagement activities (see Section 3.6), and the Mistra-SWECIA project[7] was given as an example of using a control group as well as participants, and using pre- and post- engagement interviews and surveys.

3.4 How can we capture, share, and learn from our failures?

This discussion was prompted by the recognition that we learn not only from our successes, but also from our failures. However, failure is a difficult subject to discuss. The group began by considering what we mean by “failure”: is it not achieving what was planned? Who decides what is a good or bad outcome? Participants also suggested alternative terminology, such as barriers to achieving



[7] See: http://www.sei-international.org/projects?prid=1531.

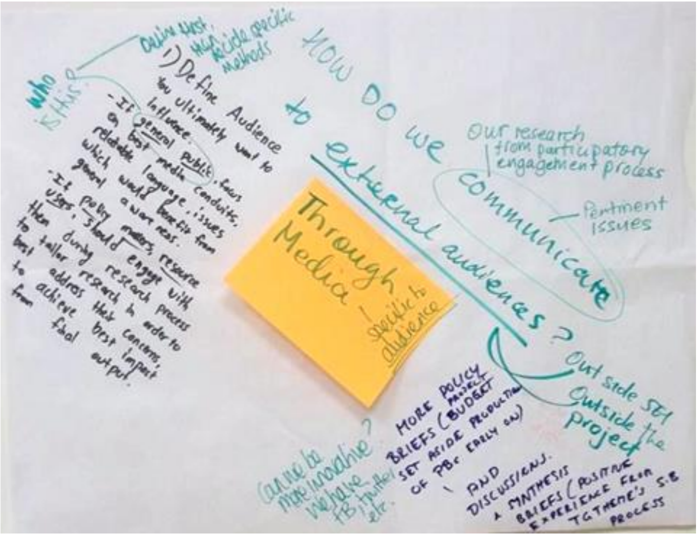
desired outcomes, challenging projects, or giving constructive feedback.

It was felt that the process of capturing and sharing “failures” should emphasize learning and be conducted in a supportive environment. Time is needed to have discussions about projects in order to find consensus and recognise what went wrong, and this obviously requires resources.

It was suggested that projects could undergo a “double blind review” after completion, where staff would be encouraged to submit reports about the shortcomings of their projects. This would then be anonymised and passed onto a member of SEI staff not involved in the project. This reviewer would then anonymously comment on the report, and the reviewee could request further information or a discussion if desired. Another idea was to have a “failure of the month” series, in order to encourage open, learning-oriented discussion of failures.

3.5 How do we communicate with external audiences?

External audiences were felt to include people outside the project (within SEI) and outside of SEI. Participants noted that it is important to define the audience you ultimately want to influence. If it is the general public (NB: who is this? define them first, and then decide the specific methods), then focus on the best media outlets, use relevant language and focus on issues suitable for general awareness-raising. It was noted that “general public” is often not a helpful term: communicators should first define who they mean by “public”, and then decide which methods are most appropriate. If our audience is policy-makers or users of particular resources, we should engage with them during the research process. This allows us to tailor research in order to best address their concerns and then to achieve the greatest impact.



The group discussed different communications options. The media was felt to be very important, but the specific channels used will vary depending on the audience. Policy briefs were also mentioned, and participants agreed that we should set aside funds to produce these. Discussions and synthesis briefs were also deemed important; participants noted that the production of the Transforming Governance synthesis briefs was a positive experience.

3.6 How do we know we are reaching / engaging with the people we want to?

The group recognized that the people we communicate or engage with may not be the ones we are aiming at, and those that are receptive to our engagement may be different to those who would benefit. “Ambassadors” in partner organizations who have wide networks may allow us to reach out to our target audiences. Such intermediaries can be hugely important.

Several participants cautioned about the use of solely internet-based engagement, particularly for audiences in low-technology environments, where paper and pen is often more appropriate. It was noted that face-to-face interaction remains very important.

We discussed various ways of measuring who our actual audience is, including stakeholder mapping and social network analysis. The group highlighted the importance of long-term study into the impact on our participants. A survey of SEI participants across multiple projects was suggested, which could be incorporated into a new monitoring and evaluation Special Initiative looking at whether engagement is effective, and the mechanisms by which change occur. This may help SEI to replicate project successes.

3.7 How do we raise the profile of stakeholder engagement within SEI and beyond?

Several suggestions were made, including some covered in other discussions, e.g. to establish a group with a mailing list and an intranet page, and to encourage the use of the weADAPT platform.

A revision of the Transforming Governance strategy was suggested to emphasize that the theme involves methods which can underpin all the research that SEI does. Something a group could do is training, for example, on how to use specific qualitative analysis packages. Other suggestions included good communication, with examples about cases and processes using visual and multimedia methods, recognizing that there are differing learning styles. A drawing emphasizing the participatory research process could help communicate our work more effectively to colleagues. Participants also agreed that we should learn more from one another. It was suggested that we create a learning team, to embed learning from projects within the institution, as currently we don't make time to think or reflect. Discussion was also had about how to communicate within the group, and a Participatory Research Group was established which aims to hold monthly web-meetings.

3.8 Engagement at local and global scales

Within the group, there was felt to be little experience and evidence of global-level engagement, with much more from the local and regional levels. The SEI Board wants the institute to engage more with stakeholders at the European and global levels. At a global level, engagement was felt to be either very formal, or very informal, using personal contacts. It was noted that sometimes SEI acts as a convenor of processes – e.g. international negotiations – rather than as a knowledge provider. It was felt to be challenging to extrapolate locally based work or content to a global scale, and it may not necessarily be desirable.

3.9 Innovative methods of engagement

The importance of using different approaches depending on the situation was repeatedly highlighted. The objectives for the engagement, e.g. policy change, behaviour change, change in business practice, need to be considered before the methods are decided. Regional context and availability of technology are also important considerations. Some examples of innovative methods were given:

- Open web-based discussion/engagement platform (weADAPT) allows findings from previous projects to be accessibly catalogued;
- Integrating qualitative and quantitative methods for uncovering perceptions and behaviour of Swedish forestry owners (Mistra-SWECIA).

It was felt that repeated engagement with stakeholders during research is important for getting continuous feedback about the project.

There was felt to be demand for better internal mechanisms of communication about engagement methods. This would allow knowledge to be shared about, for example, how to do “bottom-up” engagement, which was highlighted as being particularly effective for enabling change.

3.10 Common principles for engagement

The 2008 study of stakeholder engagement within SEI discussed in Section 2[8] suggested that the institute adopt a set of common principles for participatory research/engagement. This recommendation was felt to be sensible, but these principles have not been developed or agreed. In order to advance progress on this recommendation, we discussed what these common principles might involve. We came up with the following:

- A statement about ethics, and equity (between participants, of engagement and of outputs).
- Engagement projects need to have an “exit strategy” and should build capacity in participants.
- Researchers need to know where their project fits in a matrix of participatory research.
- When starting a project, staff should begin by thinking about outcomes in order to guide the project design, ensure it is feasible and that participation is appropriate.
- Staff need to consider that there may also be impacts on people who are not engaging in the project directly.
- Monitoring and evaluation of the impact of projects is important; ideally this should be done over the long term.

[8] Forrester, J., Swartling, Å. G. and Lonsdale, K. (2008). *Stakeholder Engagement and the Work of SEI: An Empirical Study*. SEI Working Paper. Stockholm Environment Institute. http://www.sei-international.org/publications?pid=838.

PART 2: What are SEI's peers doing to engage the public?

4. LEARNING FROM OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

Along with our internal review, we wanted to learn from our peers – other organizations undertaking research for policy in fields relating to sustainable development – about how they engage with the public on issues of climate change. To draw out such lessons a desk study reviewing the work of 10 organizations was conducted by Anna Taylor, with assistance from Radek Rudnicki. This was followed up with three in-depth case studies of particularly novel and/or effective approaches to engaging particular audiences.

It is important to note upfront that this review only focuses on Anglophone work and is mainly based on information that is available on the internet, including information about events, campaigns, print publications, etc. Because we are particularly interested in the public engagement and communications best practices of SEI's peers, which are international organizations, we assume that those performing well and innovating will have a strong web presence as part of their portfolio. However, this of course biases the results in various ways, notably by excluding information in other languages.

There were four variables of interest that formed the focus of the review:

1. Who is the audience/public being targeted? (e.g. demographic, job type, level of influence, level of education, etc.). However, it proved difficult to get detailed information on this from web content, which tends to emphasize high-level, regional and global events over localized ones, and does not provide much detail on the profiles of the individuals involved.
2. What medium is being used (e.g. textual, graphical, audio, audio-visual, etc.)?
3. What is the aim of the engagement? (e.g. provide information to raise awareness; advocacy or lobbying meant to influence behaviour or decisions; gathering of data/information; co-generation of new knowledge). However, it was found that this is often not stated explicitly.
4. What is the frequency and coverage with which the engagement occurs?

4.1 Review of 10 SEI peers

The organizations chosen for the initial review were selected on the basis of various rankings in the 2012 International Centre for Climate Governance (ICCG) Climate Think Tank Ranking, as well as the Global Go To Think Tank Rankings, which are based on an international survey of over 1,950 scholars, public and private donors, policy-makers, and journalists who helped rank more than 6,500 think tanks using a set of 18 criteria. The selection of the 10 covered in this review was based on geographic spread, range of topical entry points into the field(s) of climate change, and strength of reputation. Eight focus their work, like SEI, on environment and sustainable development. We chose to include two think tanks that do not focus on these fields because they are highly rated on the basis of their public engagement programmes.

Table 8 summarizes the findings of our review of these 10 organizations, and is shown here in order to stimulate discussion and learning within SEI and beyond. Numerous hyperlinks are included for those who wish to find out more information.

Table 8: Review of SEI's peers and their engagement activities

Organization	Geographic coverage and year established	Key public engagement activities relating to climate change	Audiences targeted with climate programmes	Levels of engagement (comment on aim, medium frequency and coverage)
World Resources Institute www.wri.org	U.S.-based with international coverage, est. 1982, has climate as a topic/theme	Convenes global meetings; involved in organizing U.S. congressional hearings and debates; publishes global reports (e.g. biennial "World Resources" reports and catalysed the Millenium Ecosystem Assessment); blogs; events (including organizing a screening of "Climate Refugees" at DC Environmental Film Festival); data portal and maps (e.g. CAIT 2.0 Climate Data Explorer; Forest Cover Analyzer); establishing and mobilizing networks (e.g. ACT 2015 consortium; EMBARQ; Open Climate Network; Corporate Consultative Group); teaching materials (e.g. BELL); workshops / dialogues (e.g. Climate Justice Dialogue); videos (e.g. EMBARQ & NYC); decision-making toolkits (e.g. TAI Tools); fact sheets (e.g. U.S. Climate Impacts Initiative); social media presence on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn	Business leaders (in U.S., Brazil, Mexico, China, etc.); political leaders; researchers; university students; local authorities; "civil society" (e.g. EMBARQ), forest stakeholders (e.g. Indonesia); farmers doing agroforestry (e.g. in Burkina Faso)	Mainly data, information and tool provision to facilitate assessment, raise awareness, learn and affect decisions; focus on annual or biannual frequency; mainly in U.S., Brazil, India, Mexico but also Indonesia, parts of sub-Saharan Africa, etc. – difficult to tell what coverage is attained within these countries; more focus on the corporate/business community than SEI
Brookings Institution www.brookings.edu	U.S.-based with international coverage, est. 1916/1927; does not have climate as a topic/theme but has a Climate and Energy Economics Project	Lots of expert blogging on various climate change topics, notably international and national climate policy, politics and negotiations, as well as climate migration – seemingly aimed at an international audience of well-educated professionals; hosting high-level events/panel discussions, often co-sponsored (e.g. The Road to a New Climate Change Agreement: Challenges and Opportunities and The Economics of Carbon Taxes); appointing high-level and influential thought leaders from outside of academia as non-resident senior fellows (e.g. Julia Gillard, ex Australian Prime Minister); extensive use of video interviews for conveying key debates, messages, findings, etc. (e.g. Gillard on education); opinion pieces published on the website and in newspapers (e.g. The Climate Change Rebound); various e-newsletters and bulletins linked to different programmes; hosting web chats (e.g. climate change and the presidential election); fee-generating executive education programmes and seminars (in partnership with Washington University)	Global, mainly Western and particularly U.S., policy-makers and advisers, thought leaders and influencers	Global orientation, targeting the policy elite with relatively short pieces (written or video) of opinion or overview prepared by authoritative intellectuals, presented in a journalistic style; a few big pieces posted per month; feature on website for comments on items (to encourage feedback and debate) but not many comments have been logged to date

International Institute for Environment and Development www.iied.org	UK-based with international coverage, est. in 1971, has climate change as a theme	Regular blogs, news items on website and monthly e-newsletter, press releases (e.g. IIED reactions to COP19 climate change conference), produce films to convey research results, key issues and debates (e.g. Planting for Change); active on Twitter (13.6K followers); regular international conference on community-based adaptation bringing together practitioners and researchers, especially from the global south; Climate Change Media Partnership providing fellowships for journalists to attend and report on UNFCCC negotiations; short issue-based briefings for policy-makers	Strong orientation towards developing and least developed countries; smallholder farmers in China, India, Kenya and Peru; global and UK media; NGO practitioners	Strong use of the media and capacity development for journalists from developing countries; growing use of video for communication and engagement both locally and globally
Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research www.pik-potsdam.de	German with international coverage, est. 1992, strength in computer modelling; 4 research domains: Earth System Analysis, Climate Impacts and Vulnerabilities, Sustainable Solutions and Transdisciplinary Concepts & Methods.	PIK initiated and co-hosts the biennial Nobel Laureate Symposium on questions of global sustainability (since 2007); partner on initiating the Climate Media Factory (Vimeo channel) where climate scientists, authors, producers and media scholars work together to develop scientifically sound and entertaining climate media to enable informed decisions in the climate debate; partnering on large summits, conferences and high impact seminars (e.g. Planet Under Pressure, Rio +20, etc.); ClimateImpactsOnline internet portal to explore regional climate impacts (pilot phase info available for Germany only)	Policy-makers in Germany, the European Commission, international organisations like the World Bank and many other national governments globally (e.g. China, Peru, etc.); the business community, mainly through institutions like the Climate-KIC (Knowledge and Innovation Community) of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology	High level engagement rather than with "street-level" publics, PIK credibility built on strong scientific outputs, especially quantitative analyses, contribute to and work through international forums such as the IPCC, International Social Science Council, etc.
Earthwatch Institute www.earthwatch.org	US-based with international coverage, est. 1971, focused on citizen science and educational expeditions, has climate change as a research type for selecting expeditions	Volunteers and internships on Scientific Research Expeditions; Teacher Programs, also runs Donation programmes, present and active on social media, very active on Facebook and Twitter, present on YouTube, LinkedIn.	Teenagers, students, teachers, businesses in U.S., UK, potentially worldwide. Offices in Oxford (UK), Boston (U.S.), Tokyo, Melbourne (Australia), Curitiba (Brazil) India and Hong Kong.	Raising awareness, education. Research expeditions in countries across numerous continents (Canada, Ecuador, India, Costa Rica, Arctic). Teaching expeditions in UK, U.S., Australia. More focused on young people than SEI. Website mainly uses text and photos. Post once a week on Facebook on average.

The Energy and Resources Institute www.teriin.org	India-based with international coverage, est. in 1974 in India, focused on Energy and CC since 1988.	TERI University - engages with younger generation, stimulates research (PhD and Masters programmes), organises seminars and training courses in India. Present on social media facebook, youtube, videos, animations, photos and text. Articles in newspapers and magazines showing viewpoints of TERI researchers on topical issues related to environment (all present on TERI's website). ClimateEduXChange - ITC courses for youth climate change themed. Edu-green portal for kids - includes Climate Change online games and activities for kids (crosswords, puzzles, poems, etc.)	Government, students, youth and kids, businesses mainly in India. Offices in UK, U.S., Japan, Malaysia, Africa and various locations in India.	2 courses per month for students and government officials on sustainability, efficiency of resources. Climate Change Forum (seminars, conferences) rising awareness about climate. 2-3 articles in magazines a month – general public. Policy briefs, papers etc. ICT courses raising capacity of the youth. Green Olympiad – annual written exam.
Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network www.fanrpan.org	South Africa-based with Africa-wide coverage, est. 2003, climate change not 1 of 5 "thematic thrusts" but cross-cutting	Partner on AfriCAN Climate Portal, an online platform for sharing information on research, policy, financing and good practices; hosting national policy dialogues (e.g. Angola); AgriDeal magazine (print and digital edition); newsletters, press releases and policy briefs; co-convening conferences (e.g. 3rd Global Conference on Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Security and Climate Change, Dec. 2013, South Africa)	National government representatives in 16 African countries, regional intergovernmental bodies, civil society groups and advocates, journalists, farmers unions/ federations, agricultural companies (see network list), also focus on youth (forums, awards, etc.)	Regional focus to link government, farmers and researchers promoting evidence-based, locally applicable policies and "climate smart" agricultural practices; emphasis on periodic face-to-face engagements; annual publication of high quality magazine with rich content
Center for International Forestry Research www.cifor.org	Based in Indonesia with global coverage. Focused on forest-related issues, est. 1993.	Wide presence on social media, including high quality Flickr account, uses mainly photos and text but also videos and blog as well, also sound. Very active on Facebook – good audience response. Running web news portal with tools. Releases books.	Southern hemisphere: India, sub-Saharan Africa, South America.	Around 10 posts on Facebook a month. Contains CIFOR research activities and general news, sustainability related.
Amnesty International www.amnesty.org	UK-based with international coverage focused on human rights, est. in 1961	Online magazine (Wire) featuring compaigns. Has developed an Iphone app. Very active on youtube and Facebook including widgets. Run campaigns, member based, donation, volunteer. Media centre – service for media professionals. Text, field researchers.	General public, governments, policy-makers. Worldwide current campaigns include Conflict Syria, Control Arms, Security of Human Rights. Multilingual sites worldwide.	Few posts per day on Facebook. Thousands of views on YouTube. Annual report and online magazine (every second month), press releases.

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace www.carnegieendowment.org	U.S.-based with international coverage, founded in 1910, global network of policy research centres in Russia, China, Europe, the Middle East, and the United States, has an Energy and Climate Programme and climate change listed as one of the "global issues"	Publish in national / regional languages (e.g. Arabic, Russian, Mandarin, etc.); regional presence with focus on hiring researchers from the region; hosts and moderates dialogues (e.g. China's national climate change adaptation strategy in an international context); lots of media engagement, Op-Ed pieces in newspapers (e.g. Transportation Energy Taxes Are Well Worth a Try); Q&A pieces on website with Carnegie researchers (e.g. Q&A on China's Energy and Climate Challenges - nice format for SEI website, building collaboration between Comms team and researchers, think Marion does some of this already but scope for much more); publish Policy Outlook briefs recommending set of actions (e.g. China's Electric Vehicle Policy); active on Twitter	Decision-makers in government, business, and civil society especially in U.S., China, Russia, Middle East and Europe	Strong media presence including print, television and radio (monthly); focus on convening high profile events (quite a significant number per year) - difficult to tell from the website what makes them stand out as top 3 Best External Relations/Public Engagement Programmes, possibly a case of age and reputation rather than particularly novel/innovative methods

4.3 Key lessons emerging for SEI from these organizations

In general, it appears that influence, reputation, and recognition of the organization are important when seeking to engage, both in order to be heard and to elicit responses from others.

Target audiences

There is a mix of public policy influencers and business leaders being targeted (with a less obvious focus on public planners, especially those at sub-national levels). It is mostly the professional, well-educated, global elite in influential places (e.g. national capitals, world cities, emerging economies) being targeted. Some of the organizations reviewed also focus on youth, but they are in the minority (e.g. TERI, FANRPAN). There is potentially some discrepancy between who the organizations aspire to reach out to, communicate with or engage and those who actually pay attention, consume materials or engage reciprocally. This potential discrepancy requires more research (including primary data collection; see the three in-depth case studies below which give some more insight). It would be interesting to undertake social network mapping of social media followers of these organizations, i.e. whom they are reaching, who is listening or consuming, and who is talking back.

Medium

The communication medium is increasingly web-based, with a trend towards shorter and more graphical and audio-visual materials.[9] However, there is still recognition of the importance and effectiveness of face-to-face engagement (i.e. events, seminars, conferences, etc.). Media engagement seems to focus on print, rather than television and radio, but it may just be that the latter are not represented on websites.

Aim

The main aims appear to be to inform, influence opinions/positions and introduce new ideas (shifting focus from problems to solutions). There are some attempts to gather data/information/comments/opinions, but these appear to be under-utilized, and there is still more one-way broadcasting than multi-way discussions (e.g. facilitated web chats/dialogues, comments facility on website, social media channels).

Frequency and coverage

This communication is mainly national and international in orientation. Increasingly there is regular (i.e. daily) communication via social media channels, while substantive materials and dialogues occur on monthly and annual bases. The challenge is how to cross-pollinate between these two fields of engagement, i.e. distilling and aggregating key talking points out of the "noisy", rapid, short exchanges taking place on social media channels, as well as chopping up and "drip feeding" results from big, weighty reports and high-level conferences into these wider, more popular, open forums.

Key questions for SEI

A key question that arises from this review is whether SEI should a) target key segments of "the public", i.e. specific publics, in particular places, with a stake in particular issues, in a more deliberate and consolidated way, or b) keep things varied, diverse and open to see what emerges? At the heart of this decision is the question: How do we think change happens, and

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[9] This is supported by the findings of the SlideShare Zeitgeist 2013 review: http://www.slideshare.net/Slideshare/slideshare-zeitgeist-2013-29038790.

where is it (most) needed? Do we want change around national policy, international negotiations, market leaders, consumer preferences, local planners, popular uprisings, primary education, etc.? We also need to consider how enabling change fits within SEI's core mission and areas of expertise.

4.4 In-depth case studies

After the review of 10 organizations, we sought to develop further lessons and insights by undertaking three in-depth case studies, including one case focusing on widespread public data collection or user generated content (i.e. not just disseminating messages) and one case that is not first and foremost web-based.

The three cases selected for further study, and relevant staff contacted, are shown in Table 9.

Table 9: Case studies chosen and key contacts

Name	Description	People interviewed
AfriCAN Climate Portal	Web-based knowledge platform, EC FP7 funding, 5 African and 5 European partners, runs from October 2011 to September 2014	Martha Bissmann (project coordinator, based at WIP Renewable Energies, Germany) Sepo Hachigonta (in charge of AfriCAN Climate at FANRPAN) Talentus Mthunzi (FANRPAN research assistant working on AfriCAN Climate Portal)
BBC Media Action Climate Asia	Largest ever study of people's experience of climate change in seven countries - Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan and Vietnam - involving survey of over 33,500 people, the results and analysis of which are provided via a web platform to governments, donors, the media, NGOs and everyone who wants to support people to adapt to the changing environment	Steve Lipscombe (project manager, BBC Media Action) Prudence Willats (assistant project manager, BBC Media Action)
Brookings hosted web chats	E.g. climate change and the presidential election, where Brookings expert Katherine Sierra took questions and comments in a live web chat moderated by Vivyan Tran, Web Producer of POLITICO	The following were contacted: Katherine Sierra (Nonresident Senior Fellow, Global Economy and Development) Vivyan Tran (Web Producer of POLITICO) Mao-Lin Shen (communications staff: Global Economy and Development)

Anna Taylor conducted interviews with representatives from the AfriCAN Climate Portal and BBC Media Action's Climate Asia. Unfortunately we were unable to establish contact with anyone able to answer questions on the Brookings web chats. It appears that they hosted a number of live web chats throughout 2010, 2011 and 2012 (on average three to five per month), but have not hosted any since then. It would be interesting to find out why they stopped. It seems chats were hosted in a regular weekly slot, with each chat lasting 30 minutes from 12:30 until 1 pm and taking a question-and-answer format with one Brookings expert and a moderator. This is an interesting communications method that we should consider testing at SEI. Perhaps we could try establishing contact with members of the Brookings communications team in the future, and even explore hosting a joint web chat as a first attempt.

The case studies below include detailed notes from the interviews with staff, which are reproduced here as they offer interesting and useful insights for further such work. We thank the interviewees for their time and willingness to share information and reflect on lessons learned.

Case study 1: AfriCAN Climate Portal

Notes from interviews with Martha Bissmann, project coordinator of the AfriCAN Climate Portal; Sepo Hachigonta, AfriCAN Climate Portal project manager at FANRPAN; and Talentus Mthunzi, Research Assistant at FANRPAN working on AfriCAN Climate Portal

Project aim

Through the AfriCAN Climate Portal (ACP), FANRPAN is targeting climate change stakeholders across Africa. This includes researchers, practitioners, project developers, government agencies, extension officers, NGOs and farmer groups. The aim is to achieve improved understanding and usage of climate information, including both scientific climate information and indigenous climate information (gathered by NGOs and researchers), as well as to increase access to climate finance information, share climate policies, and point people to other useful portals relating to climate change and Africa that are linked from the ACP.

The ACP originally received three years' funding from the European Commission, due to finish in September 2014. However, there are hopes to find a way of continuing the portal beyond the EC funding. This is something the ACP project team was keen to discuss further with the weADAPT team at SEI.

Audience

The portal is not targeting "end users", e.g. farmers and fishers being affected by climate change, but rather "information multipliers", i.e. those who interface between knowledge producers and end users. This includes research institutions (researchers and students), project agencies (project developers), NGOs, technical staff like agricultural extension officers, and policy-makers. Most notably it is for people who have good internet access, who in turn reach out to climate-affected communities. In order to know whether they are reaching their intended audiences, portal administrators look at the number of users registered on the site (1,527 as of this writing). The data indicate that they are indeed reaching these "information multipliers", although as registration is optional, it does not represent all users.

Google Analytics is used to provide information on numbers of hits and geographic location, but does not give much information on users' profiles or on how the information is being used. FANRPAN also uses the messages received via the "contact us" form on the website to see who the portal's audience is. These are free text messages submitted by people browsing on the site that often include information on who they are and why they are keen to connect with the network and make use of the portal. On average two messages are received per week.

According to Bissmann, the portal coordinator, the team does not have tools and methods to track the uptake and usage of the information which people gather from the site. This would require an additional study to be done. However, they do, and will continue to do, "spot checks" on regular users and project partners, conducting short interviews with them to create stories about usage and impact. One example of this is an EC-commissioned video that some of the ACP project partners contributed to by discussing how they were using AfriCAN Climate Portal in their work and what they see as its value. The video can be viewed here: http://africanclimate.net/fr/climate-change-africa-video-featuring-african-climate-project.

Information flows

The sharing of this information is both horizontal and vertical, as well as bottom up and top down, i.e. getting information of grass-roots practices to other local users (especially through extension workers and NGOs); getting local information "up" into policy processes; getting information about policies and from science "down" to the local level, and getting information about good policies in one country to those preparing policies in other places. One mechanism for this is through the annual AfriCAN Climate Award, which recognizes excellence in fields such as good practice, awareness-raising, and research). This involves seeking nominations and then selecting and showcasing a winner. For example, last year the award for awareness-raising was won by Nnaemeka Ikegwuonu, executive director of the Smallholders Foundation in Nigeria, for the project "Climate Change on Air",[10] in which he and his team created a series of educational radio plays to help Nigerian farmers understand the science of climate change.

Key lessons learned from the portal

The ACP project team identified several lessons learned from work on the portal to date; the text that follows in this section was prepared by Martha Bissmann with Silvia Cazzetta, communications manager at WIP Renewable Energies.

Stakeholder database: In the initial phase of the project a database of stakeholders and multipliers was built up collecting contacts of individuals and organizations. Each project partner provided a list of identified stakeholders from its network.

Lessons: Collecting contacts to build a solid network is essential, but it is not useful if the data are only listed in a document and not used. Actions to follow up on a regular basis need to be implemented for the stakeholders to be engaged in the project activities.

Interactive/dynamic web platform: The AfriCAN Climate portal was developed using Drupal, an open-source content management system that provides the editorial team with a flexible and reliable administration tool for managing the platform content. A number of functions were integrated that allow registered users to actively contribute to the development of the knowledge platform.

Lessons: Engaging users external to the consortium proved to be challenging. Despite formal requests, direct invitations and encouragement through various outreach and promotional activities, attracting external contributions has proved to be difficult. On the other hand, the launch of a "call for volunteers" to support the project was more successful than expected. Many young people (mostly students and job-seekers) expressed interest in volunteering for AfriCAN Climate. Making them part of the editorial team helped boost their motivation to actively contribute to the platform sharing their knowledge.

Links to other platforms: Getting in direct contact with coordinators of other platforms is very important. Knowledge and expertise can be shared. Media partnerships are mutually beneficial and help increase the web traffic.

Communication: The success of an online platform largely depends on how easily it can be found on the web. In other words, it depends on how well the page is "rated" by search engines, particularly Google.

Lessons: Communications actions to improve the portal's visibility on search engines are more effective than promotional activities such as leaflets distribution. Social media strategies are of great support, but they need to be developed by skilled professionals to have an impact.

[10] See: http://africanclimate.net/en/cases/climate-change-air-winner-first-african-climate-award.

Other communication platforms

The ACP is just one of many platforms that FANRPAN uses to further its policy agenda, and on its own, the portal is not seen as effective in impacting decision-making processes. The portal is part of a suite of linked-up platforms, including face-to-face dialogues, policy workshops, etc. FANRPAN also works through a network of elders and political champions in many countries, often retired statesmen, who open doors to current ministers and high-level policy-makers. Growing these personal relationships with decision-makers is critical. As part of interactions with them, FANRPAN staff can then point to information available on ACP, and politicians can then refer their technicians, who do the actual drafting of policy documents, to these resources.

The information on the portal is often quite technical and detailed. Policy decision-makers do not have the time or inclination to wade through these documents; they need much more distilled content capturing the headline messages – for example, in one-page policy briefs. These briefs can be made available on the portal, but they can also be printed and distributed directly at various inter-ministerial meetings. If many of the ideas captured in these briefs have already been discussed with decision-makers through personal contacts during the preparation of the briefs, then the uptake is much easier and better. When FANRPAN staff are creating such policy briefs, they draw not only on their own research, but also on information shared by others through the portal. FANRPAN also invests in capacity-building activities, training African technocrats who are responsible for drafting policy documents to access and use various sources of information more effectively, as it remains the case that many refer only to one or two sources, resulting in poorly formulated policies.

Monitoring impact

It is very difficult to measure and attribute project impact at the policy level. This is because there are so many influencing factors, and often change is only discernible at time-spans longer than that of a single project, especially when talking about policy implementation and not simply developing the policy documents. Sometimes, if at the beginning of a project, there is a policy process already under way that can be targeted (e.g. the development of a National Climate Change Policy in Swaziland in the case of the SECCAP project[11]), then it is possible to focus on that process and ultimately to discern some “fingerprints” of one’s research in the resulting policy documents. Making an impact on policy implementation, however, is another story, and takes more time.

[11] See: http://africanclimate.net/en/cases/strengthening-evidence-based-climate-change-adaptation-policies.

Case study 2: BBC Media Action's Climate Asia

Notes from interviews with Steve Lipscombe, project manager of Climate Asia, and Prudence Willats, assistant project manager of Climate Asia, both of BBC Media Action

Climate Asia is the largest ever study of people's experience of climate change in seven countries – Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan and Vietnam – involving the collection and analysis of survey data from more than 33,500 people. This unique dataset provides information for governments, donors, the media and NGOs – anyone who wants to support people adapting to a changing environment.

Project aim

The project was initially developed with a focus on COP15 in Copenhagen and the question of how to reach a global agreement on addressing climate change. It was recognized by BBC Media Action and their donors (mostly DfID) that doing so, in part, required finding out what people are thinking with regards to the climate, and how to mobilize people to pressure their governments. This presented somewhat of an extension of BBC's core mandate, which is research into how to create suitable programming. It involved undertaking extensive research using surveys, interviews and focus groups.[12] This is a new type of project for BBC Media Action – the first time it has released data (around 10 gigabytes) rather than using it internally to create programming, and engaged so widely with other organizations regarding the usage and uptake of this data and information.

Audience

The project team has worked with a multi-stakeholder group of 8 to 10 organizations (government agencies, NGOs, business, local media, etc.) in each of the 7 countries where the study had been conducted to launch the results. The level of engagement between the project team and each of these organizations was one measure of success. The team collected feedback from each organization on how they use the Climate Asia data and in so doing recognized the huge diversity of needs, which in turn has helped to shape the BBC offering.

The tracking of their influence on users operates on two levels. The first is the collection of analytics on the data portal. The second is a model to understand and log partners' needs and usage based on formal user testing and in-depth interviews with users. The team recognizes that it's not possible to track everyone, and thus the focus has been on tracking and documenting those users that are most engaged in using the various Climate Asia products.

Communication methods

One of main lessons from this work is that there is no "one size fits all" in terms of suitable communications products to meet audience needs, so one has to undertake careful audience segmentation, create targeted narratives and develop multiple inter-linked products. The project team has produced a report for each country, created infographics, created an online data portal and prepared guides on how organizations can prepare their own communications strategies, undertake similar research and use the data that the project has made available. They are also now starting to produce policy briefs specifically targeting in-country needs. They have run workshop sessions not only on how to use the data, but also on where the data have come from and how they have been collected, in order to build users' trust of the data. They continue to run one-day workshops with new organizations wishing to use the data and resources in order to uncover their needs and aims and then match these with what is on offer.

[12] For details, see: http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/climateasiadataportal/resources.

The project team made a conscious decision not to brand products as BBC Media Action or DfID, but rather to release ownership in order to encourage uptake and usage by others, while still providing lots of support to understand and use the data and resources to develop narratives and make them travel. Often the narratives need to be presented in local languages and so the BBC invests in making sure that local staff are skilled in public speaking and are confident in / with the narrative. The BBC is also using the results from the project to create new programmes, such as an eight-part documentary in Bangladesh.

5. SUMMARY OF LESSONS LEARNED

5.1 Key lessons for SEI emerging from our peers

Our review of peer organizations left us with multiple insights and ideas, summarized here:

- Sustained and effective research communications needs to be grown and supported, both financially and in terms of staff capacity, beyond the limits and life-cycle of single projects.
- It is important to use both quantitative and qualitative methods to gather the data and information needed to build a picture of impact. Statistics on site visits, page views, document downloads, numbers of registered users/contributors, etc. are useful to show reach, while qualitative narratives on the ways in which different audiences/stakeholder groups are engaging with and using the information are essential for capturing and better understanding uptake and application.
- The idea of using SEI's reputation and international platform as a basis for showcasing and rewarding the good practices of smaller, lesser-known organizations and/or individuals is an interesting one.
- Web-based tools are very valuable, but they are not a solution on their own, but rather need to be part of a larger communication and outreach effort. This is particularly true in most parts of Africa, where internet connectivity is still limited and the capacity of policy actors (both political and technical) to navigate and leverage such resources is still relatively low.
- It is useful and important to distinguish between different stages in the policy process and be realistic about the impact that a single project can have on these processes, especially when it comes to policy implementation.
- Different users have decidedly different needs and wants when it comes to content and how that content is made available. It is therefore essential to do very careful audience segmentation, to develop targeted narratives, and to create a range of inter-linked products for conveying those narratives.
- Infographics are becoming an increasingly important communications tool; this is an area where SEI could benefit from building up expertise and capacity.[13]

5.2 Three key lessons

The project team reflected on the insights from our peers and colleagues, and identified three key lessons on what it takes to effectively communicate research and make an impact:

1. Understand policy processes

It is critical to distinguish between different stages in the policy process, to tailor the narratives developed from research findings accordingly, and to be realistic about the impact that a single

[13] This blog post provides a useful list of tools: http://www.researchtoaction.org/2011/09/presenting-complex-data-visually-using-web-based-tools-to-make-your-development-data-travel/.

research project can have on these policy processes, especially when it comes to policy implementation. This has both to do with the limited time-span of projects and the fact that knowledge, and scientific knowledge specifically, is only one of many factors influencing policy outcomes and in many cases is not the most important or influential factor.

2. Web-based tools are valuable, but not sufficient

Web-based tools are increasingly important and valuable for making data and information available in visually appealing and accessible ways and for communicating research insights. But their impact will be limited if they are deployed on their own. Instead, it is critical that they be part of a suite of communications channels and products, including ongoing investment in face-to-face engagements that build trust and personal relationships.

3. Impact needs to be measured in multiple ways

It is important to use both quantitative and qualitative methods to gather the data and information needed to build a picture of research impact. Statistics on site visits, page views, document downloads, numbers of registered users/contributors, etc. are useful to show reach, while qualitative narratives on the ways in which different audiences/stakeholder groups are engaging with and using the information are essential for capturing and better understanding uptake and application.

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